



Santa Clara County
Open Space Authority

August 26, 2004

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TO: Mayor Ron Gonzales
Councilman Forrest Williams
Coyote Valley Specific Plan Task Force

FROM: Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

SUBJECT: Coyote Valley Greenbelt Vision

The Coyote Valley Greenbelt should be a unique, rural place of countywide importance and should provide a positive memorable experience for those who visit or pass through it, as stated in the Coyote Valley Greenbelt Interim Planning Principles accepted by the County of Santa Clara, and Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill.

The Coyote Valley Greenbelt Interim Planning Principles should now be used by the participating jurisdictions to move forward quickly in preparing a Specific Plan for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt.

The Santa Clara County Open Space Authority's (hereinafter the Authority) enabling legislation and its Mission Statement declare that open space preservation and creation of a greenbelt are among its immediate high priorities along with the encouragement of agricultural activities.

Creating the Coyote Valley Greenbelt is a worthy challenge. Its location is powerfully unique, since it lies directly between the Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill. It is characterized by having a larger proportion of rural residences and smaller lots than the other greenbelts that are being created out of the extensive agricultural and natural areas around the Bay Area. Its true rural quality, however, will become clearly seen as the development of the valley proceeds north of Palm Avenue. Fifty thousand jobs and twenty five thousand dwellings, with the urban facilities to serve them, will make the Greenbelt between the cities a sharp and fully appreciated rural contrast.

Enhancing the Greenbelt beyond its current condition will be basic to its success. These recommendations are directed to that end. They include such methods as strategic public investment, focused attention to rural aesthetics and active landscaping. Rigorous adherence to lot size and other standards, community-supported agricultural activities, and appropriate guidelines and incentives to private activities are additional ways to make the Greenbelt a successful and

beautiful rural agricultural community that will bring bounty to its residents and the thousands more living around it and traveling through it.

We recognize that to achieve the Coyote Valley Greenbelt vision and recommendations will require cooperation by all agencies having jurisdiction. We welcome the opportunity to participate in implementing the vision.

VISION FOR COYOTE VALLEY GREENBELT

The Coyote Valley Greenbelt should be a unique, rural place of countywide importance that provides a permanent rural agricultural separation between the urban areas of the North County and the South County.

It should be a special place in Santa Clara County that:

- Clearly delineates a permanent, non-urban buffer between the urban areas of North County and South County
- Supports small scale agriculture (generally 10 to 20 acres) and sustains Santa Clara County's agricultural heritage
- Provides recreational opportunities for residents throughout the county
- Contributes to the quality of life of nearby urban neighborhoods
- Protects, enhances, and teaches the ecological values of its riparian and upland areas
- Protects aquifers and natural resources while providing for flood control
- Provides safe, convenient recreational linkages to and between the trails and open space lands of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range, as well as to the urban areas to its north and south
- Provides a positive, memorable destination (experience) for those who visit or pass through it
- Maintains its rural character
- Is enhanced by the natural appearance of its adjacent foothills
- Provides a desirable rural living environment and a source of pride for the area's residents as well as for the current and future residents of Santa Clara County

RECOMMENDED LAND USE CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS

Agriculture should be encouraged to provide a variety of opportunities for farmers on working farms as for involvement of the residents of the surrounding urban communities. It would include specialty crops which can command higher market prices such as micro-greens, vegetables and flowers. It would also support strategies which can increase the farmer's income, such as community supported agriculture, u-pick and agri-tourism. Many of these are viable on smaller parcels, such as the existing 10 to 20 acre parcels. An added benefit will be support for preserving the small-family farm as part of our culture. Vineyards would also be included. The intent is to provide a variety of agricultural opportunities which include involvement of the urban population. Agricultural - related activities such as on-site sales and farmer's markets would also be included. It would exclude extensive greenhouses, additional mushroom farms and heavy-duty livestock and poultry operations such as factory farms, and large scale agricultural processing.

The continuation and extension of agriculture in the Greenbelt will be substantially promoted by public acquisition of land to make the land available to farmers through resale or lease with conservation easements on the land. A funding source for acquisition of land for agriculture could be the mitigation of loss of agricultural land in the annexation and development of the mid-Coyote area.

Continuing implementation of the County's "Right to Farm" ordinance and perhaps other similar actions will be needed to protect farmers from unwarranted nuisance actions by residents in the area.

Large lot residential of a rural nature may be continued with some limitations. The County should continue its current minimum lot sizes as designated in the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Approvals for new buildings should reflect the best information regarding individual and cumulative percolation, ground water and drainage limitations as well as other building constraints. Lot coverage and paving should be limited to reduce storm water run-off and protect the aquifer. Extensive landscaping and tree planting should be required, and use of native plants should be encouraged. Consolidation of existing small lots should be encouraged. New lot or dwelling unit approvals should include a dedication of conservation easement on the remainder of the parcel as a condition of development.

Multi-use trails and pathways should be planned to connect the urban areas to the Coyote Valley Greenbelt and Coyote Creek Park Chain and increase linkage to the Santa Cruz Mountains, Western Hillside, Coyote Ridge and Diablo Range.

Recreation areas which may be included in the Greenbelt should be limited to passive recreation, rather than facilities for organized sports.

Coyote Creek Park Chain should be substantially enlarged to protect habitat, preserve the scenic corridor, and provide additional opportunities for the recreational needs of the residents of Coyote Valley urban communities. Provision should be made for a cross-valley wildlife corridor connecting the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Mt Hamilton Range.

Heritage resources should be preserved such as historical structures and Native American sites, if any. Considerations should be given to restoring the two rows of black walnut trees that used to line Monterey Road, some of which still remain. They were planted in the early 1900's by Horace Greeley Keesling and friends to shade the road from San Jose to Morgan Hill. Also, planting of native oaks should be encouraged, to restore the oaks that once grew plentifully across the valley floor until the late 19th century.

Existing developed uses along Monterey Road and elsewhere within the Coyote Valley Greenbelt should be upgraded, screened by landscaping and abated as opportunities arise.

Viewshed corridors should be identified and preserved within the Coyote Valley Greenbelt including adjacent hillside views.

Highway 101's scenic corridor with its predominantly natural character should be protected and maintained.

Gateways or Entrances into the Coyote Valley Greenbelt should contain visual features that "announce" to travelers that they are entering the Coyote Valley Greenbelt. This may be done through signage, landscaping, monuments, and other appropriate physical features.

IMPLEMENTATION OF COYOTE VALLEY GREENBELT

The Open Space Authority recommends the following actions.

Planning and Citizen Participation

The City of San Jose, the County of Santa Clara, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District should implement the 'Coyote Valley Greenbelt Interim Planning Principals' which have been accepted by the County of Santa Clara and Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill.

Prepare a Specific Plan for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt that will implement the Greenbelt Interim Planning Principles and the recommendations in this document by all agencies that share jurisdiction. The Plan should include an Agriculture section that includes policies and programs to support permanent economically viable agriculture in the Greenbelt.

Encourage the adoption of a joint City of San Jose/Santa Clara County Habitat Conservation Plan that protects the Coyote Valley Greenbelt as well as Coyote Ridge, the Western Hillsides and riparian areas.

Encourage community participation including property owners and residents in planning and implementing the Greenbelt.

Include in the Coyote Valley Specific Plan the promotion of relationships between the urban area and the Greenbelt as well as the delineation of its borders and gateways.

Land Use Regulation and Design Review

Require design review for development in the hillsides immediately adjacent to the Coyote Valley Greenbelt to help preserve the natural character of the viewshed.

Create and/or restore riparian areas relating to Coyote Creek and Fisher Creek and other natural areas.

Create land use zoning and other regulations specifically for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt to implement the Specific Plan, including methods to encourage dedication of conservation easement in association with new development, methods to encourage consolidation of small lots, as well as methods to promote land use compatibility.

Provide accurate and consolidated documentation of existing constraints to development within the Greenbelt, such as high ground water, flooding potential and local drainage problems. Review development regulations and standards relative to the constraints and revise them as needed.

Annexation, Mitigation and Public Acquisition

San Jose should mitigate the loss of agricultural land in the Coyote Valley development. As a condition of annexation of Mid - Coyote Valley into San Jose, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) should require mitigation of loss of agricultural land. Mitigation should be at a 1 acre to 1 acre ratio with the requirement that the mitigation be effected within the Coyote Valley Greenbelt. Some variations to this basic formula may be appropriate, so long as maximum feasible provision of valley-floor land is achieved within the Greenbelt.

Identify public acquisitions with particular consideration to acquisition opportunities at the gateways to the greenbelt: scenic corridors: parcels along the streets bordering and passing through the greenbelt, and other locations which augment resource lands or provide buffer/transition areas.

Promote partnerships among agencies to implement land acquisition and management in the Greenbelt.

Financing

Develop a financial feasibility plan for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt.